United Nations

Press Release

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F R I D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

- United Nations team of technical experts to go to Albania in an advisory capacity regarding elections scheduled for 31 March.

- Secretary-General appeals for $716.6 million for emergency humanitarian assistance to some 8 million people in the Sudan.

- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development report says least developed countries continue to experience economic slow-down; economies affected heavily by Persian Gulf war.

- World Health Organization mission to leave Geneva for Kuwait and Iraq to help rehabilitate their public health services.

- World AIDS Day 1991 to focus on need to share challenge of combating pandemic.

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A United Nations official announced today that a team of technical experts was to be sent to Albania in an advisory capacity for the elections scheduled for 31 March.

Meanwhile, the United Nations mission to Albania, headed by the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Stefan de Mistura, has reported that the flight of Albanians to Italy appears to have stopped.

A United Nations press officer in Geneva said today that Albanian authorities had given assurances that laws on punishing illegal exits would not be applied, and that people who chose to return would not be punished.

She said that according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Mr. de Mistura, an estimated 16,500 Albanians were still in Italy.

Albanian authorities had told United Nations officials, she went on to say, that the people needed assurances to prevent them from leaving the

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country in the future. Those included the availability of food and other development and economic assistance, as well as the possibility to leave legally and to work in other countries. The Albanian authorities said they had already approached various countries for quotas for Albanian migrant workers. They also expressed hope that international assistance would be imminent and as tangible as possible.

The press officer further reported that Mr. de Mistura had appeared on Albanian television to assure the Albanian people, who have been largely isolated for 45 years, that the international community will help them and that the country will no longer be alone. He promised an international commitment to their future economic and democratic development.

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Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar yesterday issued an appeal for immediate international assistance for humanitarian relief assistance to some 7.7 million people in the Sudan, threatened by the drought situation.

He appealed for the provision of food supplies at an estimated cost of $659.3 million, including a component of non-food assistance, at an estimated cost of $30 million, to cover basic health needs, nutrition, water supply and sanitation, relief shelter and basic health. The logistic support costs of this programme are estimated at $27.3 million, bringing the total value of international assistance sought in this appeal to $716.6 million.

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Economic growth in the 42 least developed countries continued to slow down last year, according to a new report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Some of the poor countries, the report said, had suffered economic consequences due to the conflict in the Persian Gulf.

The UNCTAD reported that the overall economic picture had not improved since 1980 and, in at least 16 of the countries, average annual income had declined in the last decade. Average annual income in the poor countries as a group was slightly above $200, the report said, about a fourth of that in other developing countries as a whole, and 2 per cent of the developed country figure.

The UNCTAD equated the economic deterioration in the least developed countries to the continued decline of international prices for their main exports, and in 1990 to the economic consequences of the Gulf crisis. According to the report, they had suffered from financial shortfalls due to reduced flows of private remittances from nationals previously employed in the Gulf. The tourism crisis, import costs of capital goods and manufactures, as well as reduced aid flows originating from Gulf States were also listed as contributing factors.

The UNCTAD said that Bangladesh, for example, had lost an estimated $1.4 billion as a result of the Gulf crisis. This figure included loss of

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workers' remittances, loss of export earnings, loss of belongings, savings and salaries of Bangladesh employees in Iraq and Kuwait, and the cost of repatriation and rehabilitation of nationals.

Yemen, as another example, had lost about $400 million in workers' remittances. In addition, the Aden oil refinery was believed to have lost about $40 million in 1990 and $220 million this year as a result of the loss of oil shipments from Iraq and Kuwait. Yemen also stood to lose millions in budgetary support, project financing and concessional lending from the two countries, the report said.

Within the general discouraging picture from the least developed countries, UNCTAD noted the strong economic performance of a few -- mainly those exporting non-traditional commodities. It pointed to Maldives, attributing progress there to earnings from fisheries and tourism, to Bhutan due to hydroelectric power, Botswana because of diamonds, and Cape Verde because of transport facilities.

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A World Health Organization (WHO) mission will leave Geneva tomorrow for Kuwait and Iraq to help in developing a comprehensive programme for the rehabilitation of public health services in the two countries.

A United Nations press officer in Geneva said today that the eight-man team would go first to Kuwait in response to a request from that country's Health Ministry for WHO collaboration on finding technical solutions to its most urgent health needs.

She said that according to WHO the major priority was cooperation in mitigating the effect on health of heavy pollution from the burning of oil wells in and around Kuwait City. The experts were specialists in emergency relief operations, disease prevention and control, pharmaceuticals, environmental health, community water supply and sanitation, and research and training in the control of tropical diseases.

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World AIDS Day on 1 December 1991 will focus on the need for individuals, groups, communities, and nations to "share the challenge" of combating the AIDS pandemic. This year's theme was announced today by the Director-General of WHO, Dr. Hiroshi Nakajima, who said that no country could combat the disease in isolation. Preventing the spread of HIV, caring for those affected, and minimizing the social and economic repercussions of the AIDS pandemic all required the strength that came from partnership, he said.

The WHO stated that as of 1 March, some 340,000 diagnosed cases of AIDS had been officially reported to the organization. Of those cases, Africa accounted for some 84,000; the Americas, 199,000; Asia, almost 1,000; Europe, some 47,000; and Oceania, some 3,000. The WHO estimated that those figures were only one third of the existing AIDS cases. In addition, it said, between 8 and 10 million adults were infected with HIV.

World AIDS Day has been observed each year on 1 December since 1988.

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